

225 49 N<sup>o</sup> 1  
The Blessedness of Believing.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED before the  
UNIVERSITY

O F

C A M B R I D G E,

On COMMENCEMENT SUNDAY,  
In the Afternoon, *June* the 30. 1728.

By ROGER LONG, D.D.

Chaplain to His Grace *James* Duke of Chandos,  
and Late Fellow of *Pembroke-Hall*.

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Παιδυνώμεθα τοίνυν, παρακαλῶ, καὶ ἡμεῖς μετὰ τοῦ πατριάρχου  
(Αβραάμ) πιστεῖν τοῖς παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰρημίαις καὶ ταῖς ὑποχέ-  
σιν αὐτῶ διαρρεῖν, καὶ μὴ τοῖς δικαίοις λογισμοῖς κατακολεῖν, καὶ  
πολλὴν τὴν ἐγνωμοσύνην ἐπιδείκνυον· τὸτο γὰρ ἡμῶς καὶ δικαίως  
ἀποφῆναι δύνησται, καὶ ταχίως παρασκευάσει τῶν παρ' αὐτῶ ἐπηγε-  
γμένων ἐπιτυχῶν. Χρυσόστομ. εἰς γένεσ. Ομιλ. λς'.

C A M B R I D G E.

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(1794)

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JOHN XX. V. 29.

*Jesus saith unto him Thomas because  
Thou hast seen Thou hast believed,  
blessed are they that have not seen  
and yet have believed.*

**T**HE occasion of these words, as we learn from the Context was this : Our Lord had shown himself after his resurrection to *Mary Magdalen* first, and afterwards to some of his Disciples : *Thomas* was not then with them, and was so far from giving credit to his fellow Apostles, when they told him their Lord was again risen from the dead, and that they had seen him, that he declares he would not believe his own eyes in that affair, *except he should see in his hands the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side.* Some time after this our Saviour, the doors being shut, appears again to his Disciples, and condescends to give *Thomas*, who was then with them, the demonstration he desired to have ;

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that

that he was the same Person, whom they had seen crucified, and knew to be dead and laid in the grave: ——— *reach hither*, says our Lord to him, *thy finger and behold my hands, and reach hither thine hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless but believing.*

THE hitherto incredulous Apostle could not withstand the light of so clear and full an evidence, his scruples are immediately satisfied, his doubts vanish, and he owns himself convinced, not only of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, but of his Divinity also (a); since He had been able to fulfill his own Prediction and Promise concerning himself, namely, that he *had Power to lay down his life and to take it again*, and that if the Jews should destroy the Temple of his Body, He would raise it again to life in three days: ——— *Thomas answered and said unto him My Lord and my God, (a)*

OUR Blessed Saviour, in his answer to St. Thomas's declaration of his Belief, doth not seem to commend him for submitting to the evidence of a Demonstration, which it was not in his power to resist: the words of the

(a) By our Saviour's reply to St. Thomas, it is plain He understood these words *my Lord and my God*, to be a profession of his Belief that He was his Lord and his God: this sufficiently confutes their opinion who would have them to be nothing more than a sudden Exclamation, expressing his wonder at what was come to pass.

Text



Text imply rather a reproof of his Incredulity, that he would neither be convinced by the testimony of his fellow Disciples, nor by the Miracles he had himself seen wrought by his Master, to prove that he came from God: they intimate, that his giving his assent at last to a Truth proved to him beyond the Power of contradiction, gave him no title to the reward of a true Believer, but that this belongs rather to those who should in some measure submit their Reason to Faith, that is, believe the Revelations and depend upon the Promises of God, though the things Promised or Revealed were in their Apprehensions improbable, and to their Understandings incomprehensible: *blessed, says our Lord, are they that have not seen and yet have believed.*

AND thus much I think is sufficient to let us see upon what occasion, and with what design the words I have chosen for the Subject of the following Discourse were spoken by our Lord: what I have more to offer shall be levelled chiefly against those Sceptical and Unbelieving Persons who would destroy the Principles of the Christian Faith, and are for having us deny our assent to all Propositions we do not demonstratively know to be true, or are not able fully to comprehend.

4      A SERMON Preached at the

IN opposition to these Sticklers for Reason against Faith, I shall endeavour

*Ist.* To state the Notions of Faith and Knowledge, and shew in what they differ from each other, and wherein they agree.

*IIdly.* I SHALL prove that we may be obliged to assent to some truths which we cannot fully comprehend: or in other words, that we are bound to believe the Articles of our Faith, though some of them be Mysteries above our Reason.

*IIIIdly.* I SHALL answer some Objections.

*IVthly.* I SHALL consider how far Faith is an act of our will, and as such rewardable by God.

I. As to the first particular, *viz.* the difference between Faith and Knowledge, I take it to be this — Knowledge is the perswasion of the truth of a Proposition arising from the evidence of our Senses, or from the clear deduction of our Reason, and Faith is the belief of a Proposition founded upon the testimony of some person who assures us of its being true: and as we may believe a thing either upon the account of its being told us by Man, or revealed to us by God, the usual distinction of Faith into a divine and human Faith is very just. —      I T

IT is to be observed that our Senses, our Reason, and the testimony of another, whether God or Man, agree thus far, that they are several ways, not only of our being informed of any Proposition, but also of our being assured that it is true. By which soever of these ways we come to be informed of any truth, we may safely give our assent, where we are satisfied we are not deceived in that Information, though we cannot confirm our selves in this belief by either of the other two methods of Information.

THUS a Man might be sufficiently satisfied of this Truth, that our Saviour is risen from the Dead: either by seeing him himself, and conversing with him after his Resurrection, as the Apostles did, or by their Testimony witnessing the same, and confirming the truth of their Testimony by working undoubted Miracles: either of these proofs alone, would be sufficient to gain the assent of any reasonable Man, tho' he could bring no Arguments from reason of the probability of such an event: nay though it appeared to him unlikely and improbable. In both cases the Evidence is certain, and the Proofs infallible, as depending both alike upon the veracity and Goodness of God, who would neither suffer us to be deceived by our own Senses about an Object within their cognisance, in a Case of such Importance,

ance, nor assist an Impostor to deceive us, beyond the possibility of a detection, by lending him his seal of Miracles.

THERE are likewise several Truths, the knowledge of which we arrive at by the deduction of reason only; as when from clear and evident Principles we draw such conclusions as evidently follow from them: To these, though they relate to such things as cannot be the Objects of our Senses, or are such as we were never informed of by the Testimony either of God or Man, we may however safely give our Assent, and that upon the same grounds I have already mentioned, *viz.* that it cannot be reconciled to the Veracity and Goodness of God, that our Reason when soberly and impartially attended to, should necessarily lead us into error, in matters that are within its Sphere.

THUS our Reason, our Senses and the Testimony of another are so many several ways of Information and Grounds of our Assent: either of them may be depended upon, if we use due caution to prevent our being deceived, any of them, if we are not sufficiently careful, may lead us into Error. Our Senses may misinform us when they are disordered, or when the Object is at an improper distance: our Reason may lead us into mistakes, when we Exercise it about matters



matters above its comprehension, or when we are too hasty in our conclusions about such things as are within its reach: we may likewise by a too easy Credulity suffer our selves to be deceived by the subtlety of an Impostor. The safest way to prevent our being imposed upon by any of these means of information, is to make use of as many of them as the Subject will bear, to ascertain our knowledge or to discover our mistake: thus we may by Reason correct the errors of Sense, or try any pretences to Revelation: for this we may be assured of, that God cannot contradict himself in the several ways he makes use of to discover Truth to Men: so that no Revelation can come from Him which directly and clearly contradicts the plain evidence of Sense or the certain conclusions of Reason: if this were possible we might then have Demonstration on both sides of the Question, we might have Proofs equally strong that a thing is, and is not true at the same time, in which case it would not be in our Power to believe any thing at all about it.

THUS far Knowledge and Faith agree, that we are certain of any Truth, whether it be proved to us by the plain Evidence of our Senses, or Demonstrated by the clear deduction of our Reason, or affirmed by the undoubted Revelation of God. And  
indeed

indeed our belief of any Proposition upon any one of these kinds of Evidence, may not improperly be called *Science* or *Knowledge*, as being founded upon certain Proofs, all of them resolved ultimately into the Veracity and Goodness of God. We believe our Senses or our Reason, because we think it inconsistent with that Goodness which we are sure must be inseparable from the Divine Being, to lay us under a necessity of believing a falsehood, by giving us Faculties and Powers which would unavoidably betray us into Error, though used with the utmost care and caution: and we believe whatever Revelation is proved to come from God to be true, because we are sure his Wisdom is such, he cannot err, and his Goodness such, he will not deceive.

WHEN once we have by deduction of Reason proved any Revelation to come from God, we then believe every thing contained therein, because He has said it: if some things to our Reason should appear unlikely and improbable, this do's not shake our Faith, because we believe our selves to be frail and weak, shortsighted and subject to error, and we know God to be Infinite in Wisdom and Power. And this is all that is meant, when we say Reason is to submit to Faith: we are to use our Reason to examine whether any Revelation that pretends  
to

to have God for its Author, really came from Him or not : but when once we are assured that it did, nothing but vain presumption, self conceit, and too high an opinion of our own Wisdom, can keep us from believing all that He has revealed, though we can neither comprehend the manner, how the things revealed should be true, nor see the reasonableness of them : in this case we ought to remember what St. *Paul*\* says, that *the foolishness of God, is wiser than Men, and the weakness of God is stronger than Men.*

THERE is likewise this farther agreement between Knowledge and Faith, that both Reason and Revelation discover many things to us but in part : both of them lead us by the evidence of things whereof we have clear and distinct Conceptions, into the assurance of things whereof we have only confused and imperfect Notions ; both of them inform us of truths, which at least in this life, must remain Mysteries to us. However it is usual for us to make use of the word Mystery to signify some truth, which we come to the knowledge of, only by Revelation.

THUS the Immensity of God, and the Incarnation of the Son of God, are alike Mysteries to us, though one of these is deducible from Reason, and the other was brought

\* 1 Cor. 23. 25.

to light by Revelation: these truths are demonstrated to us by different ways, but we see them both as yet *through a Glass darkly*: by what we know and comprehend, we are certain there is something more in these Mysteries, to us, in this life at least, unfathomable, we behold a part of them clearly enough to be assured there is much more behind the Veil.

II. AND this leads me to the Second thing I was to prove, namely, that we are obliged to assent to some truths, we cannot fully comprehend: or in other words, that we are bound to believe the Articles of our Faith, though some of them be Mysteries above our Reason.

A MYSTERY is very well defin'd to be a divine truth, which is revealed to us but in part: it is called a Mystery upon a double account, 1. because we come to so much knowledge as we have of it by Revelation only, whereas we could never have discovered it by any natural means of knowledge we are now possessed of; and 2. because now it is revealed to us, by reason of the sublime nature of the Object, and the narrowness of our Faculties in our present mortal state, we are capable of knowing it but in part.

Now when I say we are to believe any  
Mystery



Mystery of our Religion, my meaning is that we ought to give our assent to the whole truth discovered to us, as well that part of it which is obscure, as what we clearly and distinctly perceive: this assent to both parts of a Mystery, is called Faith or belief, because it is wholly founded upon the testimony of God. Now that it is our duty to give our assent to the whole Mystery, not only so much of it as we clearly comprehend, but also that part of it which is above our understanding, is evident from hence that the whole Mystery is revealed to us by God, and the truth of the whole depends upon His Wisdom, Veracity and Goodness.

WHATEVER Proposition is proved to be revealed by God, we have as great certainty of the truth of it, as we can have of the conclusion of the strictest Demonstration by Reason: now we never refuse our assent to the conclusion of a Demonstration, though it leads us to a truth, the manner of which is above our comprehension; we ought therefore, except we will think God is more fallible than our own Reason, or that he would lead us into error by a Revelation, to believe all that he reveals, how much soever it be above our understanding to comprehend: otherwise we shall be guilty of depending more upon our own Reason, than the veracity and goodness of God.

To instance in one of the most controverted Articles of our Faith: I find it contain'd in the Scriptures, of whose divine Inspiration I am convinced by Arguments sufficient to satisfy an Impartial Enquirer, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, God and Man: I therefore give my Assent to these Propositions as revealed by God. I cannot indeed comprehend how two Natures are united in Christ, but I form an imperfect Notion of it from the Union of the Soul and Body in a Man, which I cannot help believing, though the manner of that Union be also inexplicable.

AGAIN though I can have no clear Idea of the Eternal Generation of the Son of God, yet I may form a general and imperfect Notion of his Sonship, from what I know of the relation between a Father and his Son amongst Men; it is true this is a very improper and imperfect representation, and far more unlike what it is brought to signify than the colours spread upon a Canvas are to a living Man: but it conveys the clearest Image to my Mind I am now capable of receiving, except it should please Almighty God to create in me new Faculties and Powers of Knowledge, or to enlarge those which I already have.

IN all Revelations made to us of the Invisible

visible World, it pleaseth God to make use  
 of such Notions and Expressions as are fami-  
 liar to us, such as are taken from things  
 we are daily conversant with: and if this be  
 not the only way by which we are capable  
 of arriving at the Knowledge of divine Mat-  
 ters, we have good reason to think it is the  
 best way for us, because infinite Wisdom hath  
 thought fit to make choice of it. Thus God  
 in Scripture is said to See and Hear and Un-  
 derstand, by which is meant his infinite  
 Knowledge of all things, of the manner of  
 which we are not able to Frame the least  
 Conception. Thus again, the Operation of  
 the divine Grace upon the Soul, is shadow-  
 ed to us by the nourishment of our Bodies  
 by Meat and Drink, and the everlasting Hap-  
 piness of the Saints in Heaven figur'd to us  
 under the gross satisfactions of Sense, the  
 pleasures of Feasting, and the splendor of a  
 Kingdom. In all these Cases we are to be-  
 lieve the reality of the Existence of these di-  
 vine Objects, thus imperfectly represented to  
 us; we are to Frame likewise some general  
 Notion of them, from what we know of  
 those things to which they are said to bear a  
 resemblance: thus may we very well con-  
 clude that the Happiness of the Blessed here-  
 after shall be exceedingly Great; because it  
 is compared to those things in which Men  
 take the greatest Pleasure in this Life; but  
 we must always think the Type comes far  
 short

short of the Original, and therefore we must not Reason about divine Matters from the Analogy of those things to which they are compared.

Now when we say that Faith goes further than Knowledge, or that it is our Duty to believe more than we can Comprehend, the Enemies of reveal'd Religion pretend this to be an impossibility: because say they, we cannot Exercise the faculties of our Minds at all about such Objects as we have no Ideas of: this Objection and some others upon which they seem to lay the greatest Stress, I come now in the third place to consider.

III. THIS Objection if there be any thing in it will prove too much: for if we must disbelieve the Mysteries of the Christian Religion, because they contain many things above our Comprehension, we must for the same Reason deny our assent to many Philosophical Truths proved to us by the clearest Evidence, which it is notwithstanding out of the reach of our Reason to explain. Thus the general Law of Gravitation is thought to be sufficiently proved, and yet it will remain perfectly inexplicable how a Body should Act at a distance, where it is not: and therefore it must at last, be resolved into the Will of the Almighty Creator of all things. But if this affair be still thought liable to dispute, not give



give me leave to choose another Instance, *viz.* that of the Union of the human Soul and Body. Whoever should deny this Union, must be so much a Sceptic, that it would be lost time to endeavour to convince him, and yet I believe I may venture to promise the most sagacious Enquirer into Nature, a clear and perfect Explanation of the most mysterious Article of the Christian Faith, when he shall give me a Satisfactory account, how a Spirit and a material Substance can Act upon one another.

It is not indeed contrary to Reason that they should do so, nay I am assured of it by Experience, and therefore cannot refuse my Assent to this Proposition, that the Soul and Body Act upon each other: but it is at present perfectly above my Reason to comprehend the manner how.

BUT if this be all that is meant by a Mystery, that we know it but imperfectly and in part, then, say they, almost every thing in Nature may be called a Mystery: I answer that there is still a wide difference between our Knowledge of the appearances of Nature in the material World, and that which we are able to attain in Divine matters. The appearances of Nature lye out of our reach, not so much upon the account of their being beyond our comprehension, as for our want of  
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of means to come at the knowledge of them; and therefore when new means and greater helps have been found out, to improve our knowledge, we have accordingly made further progress in our researches and greater discoveries in the nature of Things. Thus has the use of Glasses brought to our knowledge many things relating to the Sun and Planets, as well as to those Objects that by reason of their smallness escape the view of the naked Eye, which without those assistances we should never have been able to discover. And indeed as to the material World, I am apt to think most, if not all the appearances of Nature, with their Causes and Effects might be perfectly comprehended by us, if an exact account of them were by some superior Intelligence communicated to us: if an Angel, for instance, were to give us a compleat System of Philosophy, I make no doubt but it might be fully understood by the human Mind. But as to Divine matters the case is far otherwise: all the assistances that can be given to our Senses, all the improvements of our Reason will never enable us in this our Mortal State, fully to comprehend the nature of them: *Such knowledge is, in this life, too wonderful and excellent for us, we cannot attain unto it.*

THAT the dead Bodies of the Saints must undergo a great change, before they can  
*inherit*

inherit the kingdom of God, (a) that they shall be raised incorruptible and immortal, (b) that they shall be fashioned into the likenesses of the glorious body of Christ himself, (c) that the state of the blessed in Heaven shall be exceedingly happy and glorious, is revealed in the Scriptures, with all the plainness we can desire: and yet to explain fully wherein their blessedness in Heaven shall consist, was beyond the power even of an Apostle, who had been caught up into Paradise, and heard words which were unutterable. (d) Whatever impressions were made upon his Mind in that extatic Vision, it was not possible (e) for him to communicate them to others. Words which must be borrowed from Worldly Objects, can never express it, *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it, in this life, enter into the Heart of Man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him.* (f)

AND this is what we mean when we say, the Articles of Faith are above our Reason; they are some part of them in their own nature Incomprehensible to our Faculties, in this imperfect State: nay probably they will be some of them so, even to Glorified Spirits in Heaven: since we are in the Life to come to be no more than ἰσάγγελοι, equal to

(a) 1 Cor. 15. 50.

(b) 1 Cor. 15. 42, 53.

(c) Philip.

21.

(d) 2 Cor. 12. 1, 2, 3, 4.

(e) Ἄ οὐκ ἔστιν ἰ. c.

ἴσους.

(f) 1 Cor. 2. 9.

the Angels, who are said to desire to pry into some of the Mysteries of Man's redemption. \*

VAIN therefore are all our attempts to conceive or explain, further than the Scripture will bear us out, the Mysteries of Faith: as well may we hope to measure the Heavens with a Span, as with the short line of human Reason to Fathom the Depths of them: for the reality of their Existence we have all the Evidence can reasonably be desired, we have the Testimony of God himself, in those holy Writings which have all the marks necessary to prove them to be the Word of God: as for the manner of their Existence, the Nature of them is frequently shadowed to us by sensible Objects, but we are to know those Objects can be only imperfect Types of the Originals they are brought to signify, and serve only to give us general and confus'd Notions of them: we must neither carry the Analogy too far, nor Reason from the Properties of those Images of divine Truths, so as to conclude any thing more than is Revealed concerning the divine Truths themselves thus represented to us.

It is Objected by some, that under the pretence of Mysteries Men have been called

\* 1 Pet. 1. 12.



upon to believe Contradictions, which yet it is not in any Man's power to believe.

IN answer to this, I readily own, it is impossible for a Man to believe both parts of a Contradiction, whatever Proofs are brought to support them: for this Reason, we reject the Transubstantiation of the Church of *Rome*, which would have us believe, the same thing to be Bread, and to be the Body of Christ at the same time, contrary to the Evidence of Sense and Reason, which no pretence to Revelation can set aside, as was laid down in the beginning of this Discourse:

THOSE who endeavour to shew a Contradiction in the Article of the Blessed Trinity, either know not the Doctrine of the Trinity, or are ignorant of the nature of a Contradiction: for we do not believe the divine Nature to be Three and One in the same Sense, this indeed would be a flat Contradiction: on the contrary we affirm that the God-head is One and Three in different respects. We find in the Scriptures a distinction in the God-head of Father, Son and Holy Ghost plainly Expressed, in the Commission to *Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost* (a): not to mention many other Texts; particularly that plain one in St. *John's* Epistle (b) the Genuineness of which

(a) *Mat.* 28. 19.

(b) 1 *John* 5. 7.

has I think been sufficiently defended by Learned Men. This distinction the Church has thought fit to express by the word Person, not that this gives us a proper Idea, but because we have never a better. That these three Persons are not three distinct different Gods, I conclude from those places of Scripture which Assert the Unity of the Godhead.

SINCE therefore I find in Scripture these three Persons separately as well as jointly mention'd as God, and divine Worship paid them as such, I think my self bound, as I am taught in that excellent Creed, commonly called the *Athanasian*, to *Worship the Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance*: i. e. acknowledging there is a Distinction between them in one respect, and an Union in another.

How great this distinction is, how strict the Union, I own to be far above my Reason in this Life, and I am apt to think it will ever be out of the reach of my Understanding fully to Comprehend, in the other: (a) and therefore I think I ought to content my self with such imperfect Notions of these things as I am now capable of, such

a The Nature of God must be for ever Incomprehensible to every Finite Understanding, how enlightened soever it be. vid. *Chrysost. mel. αναμνησις*.

as are sufficient to instruct and encourage any Man in the good Conduct of his Life, for which purpose principally God was pleased to make known so much of this Mystery to Man: and this gives an Answer to another Objection brought against the Mysteries of our Holy Faith, namely, that it can serve to no end for God to Reveal to Man such things as are above his Reason to Comprehend.

IN answer to this I think it would be sufficient to say, that when we can give no reasons for God's dispensations with us, we ought notwithstanding to believe them to be Wise and Gracious, because they proceed from Him the Fountain of Wisdom and Goodness. A due sense of the weakness of human understanding, would never suffer us to think our selves competent Judges of the proceedings of an Infinite Being: and therefore we should, when they seem unaccountable to our Reason, adore what we cannot comprehend. — However, as to the matter before us, the Mysteries of our Holy Religion, it would not be difficult to go through all the Articles of our Faith, and shew that so much knowledge as we have of them is sufficient to furnish us with powerful Motives to engage us in a good life, the chief end for which all Revelations were made, and for which we were sent into the World —

THUS

THUS is the belief of the Trinity, and of the several Parts each Person is Revealed to have performed in the affair of Man's Salvation, of the Doctrines of the Incarnation of our Saviour, and the Satisfaction he has made for the Sins of the World, very proper to give us due Sentiments of the Justice of God, his hatred to Sin, and his mercy to Sinners.

It is a vain and fruitless Speculation for us to enquire, whether God could not have found out some other way to save fallen Mankind, besides that of sending his Son to take our Nature upon him, and to suffer Death in our stead. And it is surely exceedingly rash and presumptuous to affirm, that this was the only way, which Infinite Wisdom could invent: But that Almighty God was pleased to choose this way, to send his beloved Son to live a life of humiliation and sorrow and to die a shameful and painful Death, *For us Men and for our Salvation*, is enough to stir us up to the highest gratitude and love towards him, to make us to the last degree fearful of offending him, and yet to encourage us when we have offended, not to despair of Mercy, but to turn to him by Repentance.

FOR how great was the love of God to Man, who rather than we should perish, was pleased to redeem us by the Sufferings and  
Death



Death of his beloved Son? How great was his hatred to Sin, and how inflexible his Justice? since He would not pardon Sin, without so inestimable a Price paid for the ransom of Sinners: and yet what encouragement is given to repenting Sinners to fly to his Mercy, since he has, rather than they should perish, contrived so wonderful and astonishing a Method to save them?

THUS was so much knowledge as we have of our blessed Saviour's Incarnation, (and the same might be made appear of most of the other Mysteries of our Holy Religion) not given us only for amusement or to puzzle our Minds with difficulties, but it is profitable for *correction, for instruction in righteousness*: though there are many things in these divine Revelations involved in clouds and darkness, yet is there enough of them so clear and bright as to be sufficient, to make them a *Lantern to our Feet, and a Light unto our Paths.*

THAT there is so little Revealed to us in the Mysteries of the Gospel, is perhaps, because we are in this present mortal State incapable of knowing more, or perhaps higher degrees of Knowledge would be unsafe for us, because we should be in danger of being puffed up by them, (a) or there may be other

(a) Οὐκ γὰρ διὰ τὰ ταῦτα εἰδὼν οὐκ ἐμφορεῖται τὸ μὴ εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον εἰς τὸ διὰ τὴν ταπεινότητα αὐτοῦ ἀποκλίνειται. Chrysost. πρὸς ῥωμ. α.

Reasons, to us unknown, why we have so much as we have, and no more, discovered to us of these divine Truths. It is our duty therefore with Humility and Thankfulness to be contented with so much Light as is afforded us, and make that use of it for which it was given us.

IV. I COME now in the Fourth and last place to consider how far Faith may be accounted an Act of our will, and as such, rewardable by God.

IT is certain that the assent to any Proposition which appears to me evidently true, can no more, of it self, pretend to a Reward, than beholding the Light when the Sun shines can : now if I am convinced that any Revelation comes from God, and therefore believe it, my Faith is the same Operation of my Mind as when I assent to the conclusion of a Demonstration : if such a Faith therefore is rewardable by God, it is not for its own sake, but upon some other account : Either the care we have taken to fit our Minds for the reception of Divine truths, or the Influence those truths have upon the Conduct of our lives. It is true the Perception of truth, of what kind soever, is entirely an Act of the understanding, and consequently cannot be of a Moral nature ; but in order to prepare our Minds for the  
Per-

Perception of truths, especially Divine truths, there are many things to be previously done by us, which it is entirely in our Power whether we will do or not, and therefore so far as our belief of any Divine truth, depends upon our doing these things or neglecting them, so far is it voluntary, and so far does our Faith entitle us to a Reward, or our Infidelity become Criminal and make us liable to Punishment.

THE first step we are to take in order to this preparation of our Mind, is to be attentive to the Evidence which the Gospel Revelation brings with it, of its being true; to consider well and weigh it as the Importance of the thing deserves.

THAT this Revelation is often neglected, by the Busy, the Voluptuous, the Indolent and Careless, but especially by the Vicious part of the World, is no Reason for us to disregard or reject it: every one knows that Truth has no dependance upon our belief or disbelief of it.

A Proposition may have all the Demonstration in the World of its being true, and yet we may never Assent to it, nay we may be wholly Ignorant of it, because we have never employed our Thoughts at all about it: such Ignorance in a Man may be with-

out blame, if the things to be known do not at all concern him, such as are many Propositions in the Sciences. But when ever any Man has propos'd to him a Doctrine as coming from God, and is withall told that upon his receiving or rejecting it, his eternal Happiness or Misery depends; it is indispensably his Duty, as he is a Creature endued with Reason, seriously and attentively to consider, and examine all the Proofs he is able to meet with, which are brought to support or to oppose the divine Authority of this Doctrine.

THIS Examination ought to be entered upon, with the greatest humility, upon the account of the weakness of our understanding and the incomprehensible nature of God: with Reverence and Fear, as being an Affair of the utmost Consequence to us.

WHAT must we think then of that writer (a) who would have us try the momentous truths of our Religion by the test of banter and ridicule? as if it were an argument that a Doctrine were false or frivolous, unworthy of God or of no importance to Man, because an intemperate Wit is able to burlesque it, or to break a Jest upon it. Surely compar'd with such madness as this is, we may call it Wisdom for a Man to

(a)

L. S.

*Jord Shaftsbury*

(a)



*cast Arrows, and Firebrands and Death, and say am not I in sport?*

THERE is another thing absolutely necessary for any one who is employ'd in a business of such consequence as is that search after truth I am now speaking of, and that is Fervent Prayer to God, to lead him into all necessary truth. I do not here mention our beseeching God to send us the Grace of his Holy Spirit, because I am now addressing my self to such as do not believe revealed Religion: but they surely cannot deny Prayer to God, whom the very Heathens believed to be the Author and giver of good Gifts (*b*), to be a part of natural Religion: and yet by the ludicrous manner in which they generally speak and write about Religious Subjects, there appears so little reason to imagine they are ever in a disposition fit to pray, that one would be rather inclined to believe, *God is not in all their thoughts.*

IF any Man after a serious and unprejudiced Enquiry, entered upon under an humble sense of his own weakness, joyned with Fervent Prayer to the Father of lights, to assist and guide him, should be still unable fully to satisfy himself of the truth of the Christian Religion, if such unbelief is unavoidable to him, I will not presume to say it will be

(a) *Δύστην ἐξέω* Callim. Hymn. in Jovem.

accounted Criminal, by a merciful and gracious God: I should rather be inclined to think the merits of our Saviour might obtain a Pardon, even for one who did not believe on him, if he had done every thing which could be expected of him to inform himself.

IF after all this care and caution he is still ignorant, I should think such ignorance involuntary, and therefore excusable: but let no Man deceive himself and imagine it will be excusable for him, to disbelieve or to be ignorant, when that ignorance and unbelief is owing to his own negligence and sloth, that he would not be at the pains to give his attention to what is revealed in the Gospel, or to examine whether it be worthy belief or not.

THE Judgment we make of things is thus far voluntary, that we can withdraw our attention, when the case would otherwise be perfectly clear to us, and by that means avoid the conviction which the Argument, if attended to, would bring along with it: it is with the Understanding much as it is with the Bodily Eye, what I see I cannot help seeing, and what I understand I cannot help understanding: but as in the case of visible Objects I can shut my Eyes or turn them another way, so I have it in my Power, to  
take

take my Thoughts off from any Subject that is offer'd to my Consideration, and fix them upon something else: by this means do Men often avoid the conviction which would otherwise break in upon their Minds, and then the Error or Ignorance consequent to this behaviour becomes voluntary. In this Conduct they may be said very properly to love Darkness rather than Light, because they choose to be Ignorant of what they might easily know, and what they certainly would know if it were not for their own negligence or obstinacy.

THIS sort of behaviour is sometimes in Scripture express'd by those phrases of Mens *shutting their Eyes*, and *stopping their Ears*: and if by this means they are afterwards deficient in their Belief, or irregular in their Practice, it will be no excuse for them to say they knew no better, since their Ignorance is wilfull and of their own choosing.

BUT further, since our Passions, Affections and Inclinations have a great Power to byass our Understandings, and induce us to make rash, precipitate and false Judgments of things, or to proceed in our Conduct as if we had made such Judgments, it is as necessary for us to keep our Minds out of the power of these, if we would judge according to Truth, as it is for us to have our  
Eyes

Eyes (a) clear and free from distemper and disorder, if we would have a true view of visible Objects: we must therefore, to make us capable of a true Faith, subdue our Lusts and Passions, not only those Gross and Sensual ones, which are plainly owing to the Body, but even those less observable, though not less dangerous ones, of the Soul: such are Prejudice and Partiality, Pride and Self conceit; affection of Novelty or Singularity, the ambition of being a Head and Leader of a Sect. By these Men are often led into Error, and rendered obstinate in their Error.

SOME Men out of a natural warmth of Temper, take up with the first Appearances, if any thing makes a lively Impression upon their Imagination, they mistake a strong Fancy that a thing is true or false, for a proof that it is so: these quickly give their assent and as quickly change their opinions. Many are influenced in their belief by their hopes and fears: if a Man sits down to examine into the truth of Christianity with a fear he should find it credible, and is all the while wishing it might not appear true to him, it is very probable he will never meet with the Conviction he is so desirous to shun.

(a) This Comparison is frequently made use of by the Heathen Moralists.



SOME are again byassed by the particular way of Study they are used to : in this way of thinking nothing will please the Orator but Eloquence, or the Mathematician but strict Demonstration. It would be endless to reckon up all the prejudices and prepossessions which may obstruct a Man's believing the Gospel, how worthy of belief soever it may appear to an impartial Enquirer : but I believe no disposition of Mind can render a Man more unfit to receive the Gospel in its purity and simplicity than Ambition and Pride.

THE *Pharisees* and leaders of the *Jews* were kept from being convinced by the Miracles of our Saviour, because they were afraid the *Romans* should come and take away their place and Nation, because they were too Proud to be taught by the Son of a Carpenter, because they loved the praise of Men more than the praise of God. And we have examples in Ecclesiastical History of some who have turned Hereticks, merely because they were disappointed of Preferment they expected in the Church.

WE are told in Scripture, that God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble : and that Wisdom is revealed to the Meek : Hence it very often comes to pass, that a Man's Faith in divine Revelations, and his being sound and stedfast in this Faith, is owing,  
not

not so much to the Greatness of his Capacity, as to the Purity of his Heart: not so much to his being endued with superior Sagacity and quickness of Apprehension, as to his being Cloathed with Humility: so that if he is not rewardable for believing what appears to him worthy of belief, yet will the Mercy of God reward him, for preparing his Mind for the Reception of divine Truth, by the exercise of those Virtues and Graces, without which he would never have believed at all.

AGAIN, our Faith may be rewardable when the giving our Assent to what we cannot fully comprehend is not owing to an easy Credulity, or because we will not be at the pains of an Enquiry, but because we are thoroughly affected with a due sense of the Wisdom of God, and a firm reliance upon his Goodness; and can therefore content our selves with so much Knowledge in divine Matters, as he has thought fit to communicate to us: and are not for being Wise above what is Written. If our Reason cries out with Nicodemus *how can these things be?* our Faith and Trust in God is ready with this Answer of our Lord, *with Men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible.*

THIS trust in God's Wisdom and Goodness will dispose us to believe more than we  
can

can comprehend, and entitle us thereby to the blessing promised to those who do not see and yet believe: we shall by copying the Faith, obtain the rewards of faithful *Abraham*, who against hope believed in hope. The Father of the faithful believed the Promise of God, that in his Son *Isaac* his seed should be called, would be certainly fulfilled, though he should slay that Son, as he was ready at God's command to do, before *Isaac* had any offspring. He did not stagger in his Faith at the apparent Impossibility, but judging Him faithful who had Promised, and knowing that *God was able even to raise him from the dead*, if that were necessary to fulfil his Promise, he relied upon the Veracity and the Power of God for the Performance.

LASTLY our Faith shall be rewarded for the good Effects it produces in us, and the Influence it has upon our lives. The Apostle St. *Thomas* was at first too slow of Heart to believe the Resurrection of our Lord, foretold by our Saviour himself, who had wrought so many Miracles before his eyes to prove the truth of his Mission, and attested by *Mary Magdalen*, and his fellow Disciples, who had seen and conversed with our Lord after his Resurrection. But when once he did believe, he rested not in an unactive and lazy Faith, but gave proof of the firmness of his belief by labouring more abundantly, Preaching the

E

Gospel

Gospel in the remotest Parts of the World with the most indefatigable Labour and the greatest Hazard, and at last Sealing the truth of it with his Blood.

LET us adore the Wisdom of God, who suffered an Apostle so unreasonably to doubt of our Lord's Resurrection, that we might have the stronger Evidence to build our Faith upon: and let us bless and praise his Holy Name for the Graces manifested in St. *Thomas* after he did believe, for his unwearied pains and diligence in his Ministry: and let us take care that our Faith be fruitful in good Works, without which it is of no value in the sight of God.

THIS advice is of the utmost importance to every Christian, but we of the Clergy are obliged if it be possible, by stronger ties than others, to let our Faith appear by our good Works. Our Example is the most probable way to bring others by a like Faith and Obedience, *to glorify our Father which is in Heaven*: whereas without a good Life, whatever our Preaching is, we shall certainly help to promote Infidelity in the World: since we may our selves be justly suspected of unbelief, whilst we are endeavouring to perswade others to believe.

IN a word, nothing but sincere Obedience to the Will of God can recommend any Man  
to



to his favour. Had we *Faith that could remove Mountains*, had we the *knowledge of all Mysteries*, had we such utterance that we could *speak with the Tongues of Angels*; they would all *without Charity be nothing worth*. If we believe the Gospel, let us live as it becomes the Gospel. So shall our Faith at last end in Sight, and our Hope in Fruition of those Joys, which God has prepared for his faithful Servants in another Life.

To these Joys God of his infinite Mercy bring us All, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, to Him with the Father and the Holy Ghost, Three Persons and One Eternal God, be all Honour and Glory now and for ever. Amen.

**F. J. N. I. S.**

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